Editorial

# Diplomacy in the Holy Land:

## New Sources, Themes and Topics

Roberto Mazza

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, diplomacy is "the activity of managing relations between different countries," while a diplomat is "a person whose job is to represent his or her country in a foreign country."[1] Though this may be a simplified definition of a rather complex matter, it highlights the fact that we often believe diplomacy refers solely to how countries relate to each other; in other words, it is a business of high politics. With this issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly*, we want to show other aspects of diplomacy, not necessarily related to high politics and often with direct consequences for the people living in a specific territory: in our case Jerusalem and, more broadly, Palestine. Foreign residents and diplomats have been often marginalized when discussing the local population, as if they were somewhat alien to the local environment in which they lived and operated.

The establishment of consulates in Palestine was a response to increased activity in the economic, social, and religious spheres of foreign subjects in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. The British consulate was first established in 1839, followed by the German in 1842, and then those of France, Italy, Austria, and Russia. Other smaller consulates opened at the beginning of the twentieth century, making Jerusalem a center of diplomatic activity that went beyond the borders of the city and the region. As representatives of their governments, consuls had to deal with both Ottoman authorities and the local population. Consuls were, in general, largely critical of the Ottomans and of the locals. Despite their latent and visible Orientalism, it was partly due to their constant pressure that the Jerusalem municipality worked to improve services like lighting, cleanliness, and public security. It is rather more difficult to assess the relationship

between consuls and the local population; often, consuls did not report about these relations or chose some sort of isolation. However, regardless of the degree of relations with the indigenous population, consuls were, and still are, residents of the locations in which they serve, whether they liked it or not.

The articles presented in this issue of *JQ* are for the most part devoted to showing the variety of interaction between consular missions and the local environment, shifting the gaze from the center to the periphery. Some of the articles seem to look away from Jerusalem and Palestine to focus on political aspects of consular representation, as in the case of Elena Astafieva discussing Russian policies in Palestine toward the end of the nineteenth century. This analysis shows that Russia and Palestine were closer than we may think, by examining how Russians imagined and interpreted Palestine as Holy Land. But it also gives a glimpse of the impact of Russian pilgrims in Jerusalem. These were men and women who may have looked upon local Jerusalemites with some suspicion – Astafieva reminds us of the shock many Russians experienced upon learning that the Holy Land was ruled by Muslims – but they could not avoid interaction with the 'natives', whether for business or other services.

Diplomacy and religion is a topic also discussed by James Stocker and Kostantinos Papastathis, as they look at the influence exercised over religious institutions by the United States in the first case, and Greece in the latter. Stocker brings back to light a neglected aspect of U.S. involvement in Jerusalem. In 1955, as the Armenian patriarchate of Jerusalem was involved in an internal struggle over the appointment of the patriarch, the Jordanians dragged the U.S. administration into a fight with which they likely did not want to engage. The end result was the appointment of Yeghishe Derderian – an anti-communist of a sort suiting American interests – who served until his death in 1990, shaping the life of Armenian community in Jerusalem for nearly thirty years. Papastathis, meanwhile, looks at the attempts of Greek diplomacy to influence the Greek Orthodox Church in Palestine during the British Mandate. Athens's activities aimed at the preservation of the Greek character of the church, opposing the indigenous Orthodox who sought to Arabize the church hierarchy. Athens, in the end, may have lost the diplomatic battle; however, as the church failed to Arabize and the status quo remained untouched, Greek's diplomatic goals were achieved through other avenues as suggested by Papastathis.

Articles by Dominique Trimbur and Clementine Rubio examine some murky features of French diplomacy. Both underline how often we are led to believe French influence was second only to the British. However, both also suggest that there was a great difference between perceived and real projection of power. Trimbur tells us the convoluted story of the French consulate, from its opening in the late nineteenth century until the 1930s, when a suitable building was finally found. The long-running saga of the search for an appropriate home for French diplomacy in Jerusalem was viewed as a matter of prestige with regard to both the diplomatic representations of other global powers and the local population. Though the French may have failed for decades to settle down in Jerusalem, they invested time, money, and effort in spreading the French language. Rubio shows how French was used as a form of soft power in order to influence the local population from the mid-nineteenth century. What the French called cultural diplomacy was an

attempt to create a link between France and the local population through the medium of French language, which was seen as the language of the *mission civilizatrice* and the *lingua franca* of the world. At the same time, however, a "language struggle in schools" was ongoing under the Ottoman, and later during the British, administration. Once the Vatican removed the French religious honors – briefly discussed by Paolo Zanini in his article on Vatican diplomacy– France settled for a softer presence in Palestine.

The works of Linda Jacobs and Dotan Halevy are groundbreaking, bringing back to life the agency of two individuals swallowed by the larger diplomatic history of the region. Linda Jacobs investigates the life of Nageeb Arbeely, a Syrian Christian who moved to the United States in 1878. Arbeely, who studied law and toured the country lecturing on "life in the Holy Land" and "Mohammedans customs," managed to be appointed U.S. consul in Jerusalem, replacing the little loved consul Selah Merrill. Arbeely, however, was not confirmed, as Ottoman authorities could not allow an Ottoman subject, which Arbeely technically remained, to become the consul of a foreign power. Eventually, Arbeely returned to the United States without serving a single day as consul. Nevertheless, this is a fascinating story of an individual who tried to make a trip back to his native land invested with the authority and power of a foreign country. Dotan Halvey brings to us the story of the British consular agent in Gaza, Alexander Knesevich. A resident of Gaza, Knesevich spoke fluent Arabic and Turkish, and was acquainted with several European languages. Though an Arabized Austrian subject, he was eventually picked by the British as consular agent. Halevy, while detailing Knesevich's background and career, highlights the necessity of looking at diplomatic networks in the region as a whole; Gaza was not isolated from Jerusalem, and the work of Knesevich and other consular agents needs to be reconsidered, as they often held strong local connections independent of their official diplomatic positions.

Reconsidering consular activity is the purpose of two co-written articles, the first by Maria Chiara Rioli and Stéphane Ancel, with a short contribution by myself, and the second by Stephane Ancel and Vincent Lemire. Both articles explore archives largely neglected – for different reasons. The European Research Council–funded Open Jerusalem project, under the initiative of Lemire, has brought to light a significant amount of material related to the history of Jerusalem from the 1850s onward. The article by Rioli, Ancel, and myself is dedicated to the Italian consulate, and shows the potential of the consular records preserved in Rome. Forgotten – in fact, abandoned in a corner of the Italian archives – the archival material recovered not only sheds light on the Italian consular mission, but, looking at the catalogue, it seems this material may yield more "juicy stuff," as in the case of Zionist-Arab-Fascist relations in the late 1920s. The second article, by Ancel and Lemire, deals with new findings at the National Archives of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa and, more importantly, at the Ethiopian Archbishopric Archives in Jerusalem. At the beginning of the twentieth century, as the authors point out, Ethiopians in Jerusalem employed different interlocutors according to need and opportunity, making this yet unexplored material crucially important in the discovery of further details of the history of the city and its communities.

Two final articles examine the diplomatic role played in Jerusalem by international

organizations: UNESCO and the Vatican (the Holy See can hardly be confined to a nation-state). Paolo Zanini provides readers an overview of the development of Vatican diplomacy in Palestine through the first half of the twentieth century. The Catholic Church was and still is represented in Jerusalem by a large number of Catholic organizations, including the Latin patriarchate and the Custody of the Holy Land, but also the Arabic-speaking Melkite patriarchate and a variety of orders speaking a vast array of global languages. Zanini tells us that, with the advent of the British Mandate, the Holy See tried to get a grip on the various positions expressed by all those organizations and orders with the establishment of an Apostolic Delegation – in other words, a Vatican consulate in all but name. The Catholic Church was split over Zionism and Arab nationalism; the opening of the Apostolic Delegation would have allowed the Vatican to maintain neutrality, while its various affiliates would be able to express individual views. Benedetta Serapioni exposes another complex set of diplomatic relations in her discussion of UNESCO's first mission in the Holy Land. Considering the controversies caused by UNESCO in the last few years over the definition of protected sites in the holy land and resolutions adopted, this article will present the readers with an overview of the hard beginnings of UNESCO in Jordanian administered Jerusalem. What UNESCO did in 1959 was to export a model of heritage conservation based on western standards and in time to establish a form of authority over the preservation of the holy places while claiming to be a *super partes* mediator.

This issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly* also hosts an article dedicated to recent events in Jerusalem. Abd El-Rouf Arnaout reports the events that unfolded in July of this year following the attack perpetrated by three young Palestinian citizens of Israel at the Haram al-Sharif, killing two police officers before being killed themselves. As the Israeli government decided to install metal detector at the entrance of the holy site, Palestinian Muslims decided to initiate what I would defined an act of "religious diplomacy," praying in the open in the streets adjacent to the Haram al-Sharif. This sort of peaceful protest was unprecedented and triggered divisions among the Israeli establishment: the government would have pushed forward with these measures, while the military understood that it was better to remove the controversial metal detectors, as eventually happened.

An organic history of diplomacy in Jerusalem – one that integrates the local with the international, hard power with soft, the role of individuals with that of institutions – has yet to be written, and perhaps never will be, considering the number of challenges such work would need to overcome. Still, as guest editor of this issue, I hope that I brought to the journal and its readers a fresh perspective on the topic of diplomacy in the Holy Land, putting the city at the center of global diplomacy.

*Roberto Mazza is Lecturer at the University of Limerick and Research Associate at SOAS, University of London. His research focuses on late Ottoman Palestine and the early British Mandate with a special interest in Jerusalem.*

**Endnotes**

1 *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 352.